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PARTIAL RELEASE
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CONCURRENCE REQUESTED -

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINT AR
SUBJECT: ADMIRAL MASSERA SPEAKS OF DIVISIONS IN ARMED FORCES

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 7976

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1. AT PRIVATE DINNER PARTY EVENING DEC. 7, ADMIRAL MASSERA TOOK DEPUTY ASST SEC BRAY AND POLCOUNS SMITH ASIDE AND VOLUNTEERED A LONG DISCUSSION OF THE INTERNAL SITUATION WITHIN THE GOA. HE SAID THAT WITHIN "MILITARY PARTY" TWO MAJOR GROUPINGS HAVE NOW DEFINED THEMSELVES.

2. THE FIRST, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS THE "PLURALIST, DEMOCRATIC FACTION" (AND OF WHICH HE DESCRIBES HIMSELF AS LEADER) IS SUPPORTED BY THE AIR FORCE, THE NAVY AND THE"ARMY OF THE INTERIOR" (I.E. THE CORPS COMMANDERS AND OTHER TROOP COMMANDERS IN THE PROVINCES). IT REPRESENTS THE MAJORITY WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. THE SECOND FACTION, HE SAID, CENTERS AROUND THE TOP LEADERSHIP OF THE ARMY AND HAS THE SUPPORT OF A SMALL MINORITY. HE NAMED GENERAL VIOLA AS ITS PRIME MOVER. THIS SECOND GROUP, MASSERA CLAIMED, IS ANTI-AMERICAN, ANTO-DEMOCRATIC AND HAS TIES WITH THE LEFT. IT WISHES TO CONTINUE THE OLD PRACTICE OF GOVERNING BY STRIKING BARGAINS AMONG A FEW UNREPRESENTATIVE LEADERS. IT IS THIS MINORITY GROUP, HE WENT ON, WHICH IS ALSO BLOCKING PUBLICA-TION OF THE LIST OF THOSE DETAINED BY GOVT. WERE IT NOT FOR INTERIOR MINISTER HARGUINDEGUY, HE ASSERTED, LIST WOULD HAVE BEEN OUT LONG AGO. MAJORITY FACTION (AND, INFERENCE WAS, HE HIMSELF) ARE MORE ATTUNED TO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE THAN IS THE OTHER GROUP.

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3. TURNING TO PRESIDENT VIDELA, MASSERA DESCRIBED HIM AS "WEAK, INDICISIVE AND INCAPABLE." JUNTA IS THE SUPREME EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY, BUT VIDELA, DESPITE HIS FAILINGS, IS TRYING TO PLACE HIMSLEF ABOVE THE JUNTA. THIS SITUATION COULD NOT CONTINUE, MASSERA WENT ON, ADDING THAT THERE MUST BE A "REDEFINITION OF POWER" WITHIN NEXT TWO TO THREE MONTHS. HE NOTED THAT HE MIGHT RETIRE AS COMMANDER OF NAVY IN THE PROCESS. HE STRESSED THAT HE WAS NOT SUGGESTING THAT THERE WILL BE A MILITARY UPRISING TO OUST PRESIDENT VIDELA; RATHER, THERE WILL BE A PEACEFUL REDEFINITION "BECAUSE WE ARE THE MAJORITY AND WE ARE RIGHT." AS A RESULT OF THIS REDEFINITION, HE SAID, THE JUNTA WILL BE RECONFIRMED IN FACT AS WELL AS IN NAME AS THE SUPREME EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY. THERE MIGHT BE A FOURTH KEY FIGURE WHO, WHETHER CALLED PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER, WOULD ANSWER TO THE JUNTA BUT WOULD BEGIN DECISIVELY TO ADMINISTER AND REORDER THE COUNTRY IN A DEMOCRATIC WAY.

4. ADMIRAL MASSERA SAID HE WAS NOT TELLING US THIS WITH THE IDEA OF ASKING FOR US SUPPORT; WHICH WOULD CLEARLY NOT BE PROPER OR FEASIBLE. "WE DO NOT WISH YOU TO DO ANYTHING", HE SAID, "BUT WE BELIEVE IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT THE UNITED STATES MAINTAIN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THIS MAJORITY FACTION IN THE ARMED FORCES WHICH I AM CONVINCED WILL SHORTLY GOVERN THE COUNTRY".

5. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT AS A CITIZEN HE WAS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CONDEMNATION OF ARGENTINA IN THE US CONGRESS, BUT THAT HE WAS CONCERNED LEST SOME ACTION, POSTURE OR STATEMENT OF CONDEMNATION OF THE US HELP THE MINORITY FACTION CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION.

6. NEITHER BRAY NOR SMITH RESPONDED TO OR COMMENTED ON MASSERA'S MONOLOGUE.

7. COMMENT: IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT MASSERA'S DESCRIPTION OF THE VIDELA-VIOLA GROUP AS "ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND LINKED TO LEFT" WHILE OTHER FACTION IS "PLURALIST-DEMOCRATIC" IS SIMPLY SELF-SERVING. VIDELA AND VIOLA ARE CERTAINLY AS DEMOCRATIC AS MASSERA (WHICH MAY NOT BE TO SAY MUCH). INDEED, MOST OBSERVERS DESCRIBE THE "MAJORITY FACTION" REFERRED TO BY MASSERA AS HARDLINERS AND THE VIDELA-VIOLA GROUP AS THE MODERATES. IN HIS PRESENTATION, THEN, MASSERA IS ATTEMPTING TO STAND PREVAILING DESCRIPTIONS ON

THEIR HEAD.

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8. MASSERA'S MONOLOGUE [illegible] DEGREE TO WHICH IT REVEALS THE DISSENSIONS AMONG THE TOP MILITARY LEADERS AND THE CAUSES OF THE TENTIONS AND IN-FIGHTING OF WHICH WE HAVE HAD SOME INTIMATIONS DURING THE PAST WEEK OR MORE. ON THE BASIS OF THIS AND OTHER EVIDENCE IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THESE DISSENSIONS MAY BE REACHING A POINT OF SIGNIFICANT FERMENTATION.

9. MASSERA'S AMBITIONS HAVE LONG BEEN RECOGNIZED, BUT IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS THERE HAD BEEN SOME EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST HE MIGHT HAVE RESIGNED HIMSELF TO RETIRING AS AN ADMIRAL AND NOT AS PRESIDENT. ON THE BASIS OF HIS CONVERSATION, THIS MAY NOT BE THE CASE [redacted] MASSERA WAS TALING IN TERMS OF GENERAL DIAZ BESSONE TO REPLACE VIDELA AS PRESIDENT [redacted] BOTH BRAY AND SMITH, HOWEVER, HAD DISTINCT IMPRESSION FROM WHAT HE SAID THAT MASSERA IS THINKING OF HIMSELF AS THE NEW PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER RESULTING FROM THE "REDEFINITION OF POWER." WHETHER HE, OR THE SO-CALLED "MAJORITY FACTION", HAVE THE STRENGTH OR THE WILL TO OUST VIDELA REMAINS TO BE SEEN. CERTAINLY IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEY HAVE THE SUPPORT OF ALL THE CORPS COMMANDERS AS MASSERA CLAIMS. HILL

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